

Documenting tradition

Short story writers can benefit from the tradition of story telling in Punjab

By Muhammad Jawad

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Kamal Kahani

By Muhammad Saeed Bhutta

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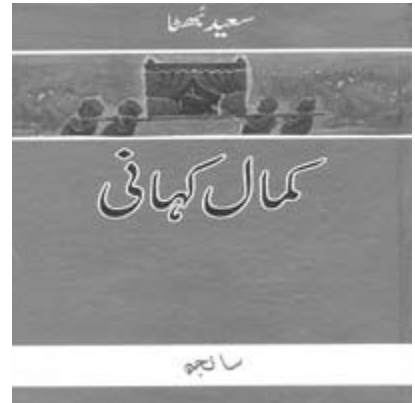
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Story telling is in the nature of man. Symbols, signs, conventional and traditional usage of diction and the moral content within a folk tale signify the collective consciousness of the people of a particular culture. Short story in Urdu and Punjabi is a borrowed art and has a strong connection with Russian, English or French literature.

In our culture the story telling (not story writing) is part of a strong oral tradition. In the music of South Asia we find a strong oral tradition also through which we sing, learn, teach or present music. The historical significance of oral tradition can not be rejected on the ground that it is unpublished, unwritten and is unsafe from additions, mistakes or exaggerations. These words are the collective effort of a specific culture signifying their approach towards history, human relationships and life.

Dr Saeed Khawar Bhutta has tried to preserve that tradition. This process of preservation is not made up by any artificial efforts. What the author did was contact a mirasi named Kamal in the village of his native area, listened to him and carefully wrote by words. Dr Bhutta is of the opinion that there is a missing link between short story in Punjabi and the oral tradition of story telling in Punjab. Short story writers can benefit from this tradition.

These short stories encapsulate various historical events including the battle between Sikandar and Poros. The description of Alexander the great, his great mentor Aristotle, Poros or Dara from Iran is very interesting. Raja Poros is a great ancient hero of our history. In our oral tradition his bravery and wisdom is ignored. 'Raja Karnal' is the story of a man who is a king by birth and a saint by nature. The story beautifully describes that the real king is the king of heart -- a heart which is full of mercy and love. 'Gaman Sochiar' is a remarkable story about the power, sanctity and grace of truth. Truth demands bravery and the hero of the story has both. 'Chaar Sianain' is a



description about virtue. Only a virtuous man should be the leader. The story also tells us that the real virtuous man rejects authority. Rather, he loathes authority.

All the stories have strong moral lessons. These lessons stem from the events of the stories and the actions and consequences of the characters within those events. These attributes make these stories a reality and keep them from becoming mere sermons.

The hero of Punjab, according to these stories, is 'fakir' and not king. If the emperors or kings are praised in our history, it is because of their bravery, truthfulness and courage and not because of their power and wealth. The heroes of Punjab don't treasure authority. Intrigue, cowardice and lust are not their attributes.

The great female characters of Punjab are personalities who are committed and loyal to their lovers, husbands and parents. This oral tradition rejects the cowards, liars, cheaters and sexual perverts like the step mother of Raja Karnal.

In writing this book, Dr Saeed Bhutta has made a praiseworthy effort and it's a labour of love, interest and commitment. If Punjabi short story writing and Punjabi tradition of story telling both recognise this missing link, it will be a great contribution of Dr Bhutta's.